

U.S. Reported

Withholding A-Arms

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Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara, reportedly over the objections of the Army, appears to have decided that tactical nuclear weapons should not be given to front-line combat units in Europe.

This came out when the Pentagon issued a denial of some points in a version of the story printed yesterday in the Chicago Tribune, but left the core of the story unchallenged.

The principal weapon involved seems to be the Davy Crockett, the Army's lowest yield and shortest range nuclear weapon.

Reportedly 20-to-40 Ton Yield

The weapon is reported to have a yield equivalent to 20 to 40 tons of TNT and a range of perhaps a few thousand yards.

A 20-ton yield would be one-thousandth of the bomb used at Hiroshima and one-millionth of the size of the largest hydrogen bomb the U.S. has reported detonating.

But even this smallest of the nuclear weapons would still be a hundred times more powerful than the largest conventional artillery shell in the U.S. arsenal.

During the presidential campaign last fall, Sen. Barry Goldwater argued such weapons should be considered "conventional." President Johnson answered that there was no such thing as a "conventional nuclear weapon."

The Pentagon yesterday refused to provide any informa-

tion on what McNamara had done. But it seemed likely that he had decided either that weapons like Davy Crockett should not be stored with front-line units or that he refused to approve a contingency plan to give the weapons to front line units in the event of a crisis.

In either case the issue, although ostensibly only a matter of technical detail, turns on basic judgments of the role of tactical nuclear warfare in the defense of Europe.

The arguments for the many small weapons distributed along the front have been, first, that it is the best arrangement for fighting a tactical nuclear war; and, second, that putting tactical nuclear weapons in the hands of relatively junior officers at the front is the best way to convince the enemy that you really intend them to be used.

Thus proponents of the scheme, who apparently include most Army officers concerned with the issue, feel that the many-small-weapons approach is both the best way to deter an attack and the best way to defeat it if it comes.

Countering View

The arguments against the scheme have been, first, that distributing lots of small weapons at low echelons would have the effect, if not the intent, of weakening the President's control over the use of nuclear weapons; and second, that until and unless the Russians start distributing small nuclear weapons to their front line units there is no military need for the U.S. and NATO to do so.

Opponents of the scheme view it as both risky and unnecessary.

Part of the problem of presidential control is the sheer physical difficulty of preventing the use of a weapon by an embattled junior commander when hundreds, and perhaps thousands of them have been distributed.

Even if it can be worked out, putting the weapons in front line units telescopes the time the President might have to decide whether to start using them. Unless he decides very quickly, units with the weapons might be overrun and the weapons captured.

If the weapons are farther back, this time pressure is eased. The President has time to see whether the attack can be handled without using nuclear weapons and whether the war can be stopped short of large scale use of nuclear weapons.

Those who believe that NATO should plan on fighting some sort of nuclear war in the event of any substantial engagement in Europe do not worry very much about the danger of tying the President's hands so that he has little choice but to use nuclear weapons.

On the other hand, for those who favor the Administration's policy of building substantial non-nuclear defenses in Europe, tying the President's hands is something to worry about very much.

There is, in this view, not much point in spending a lot of money to free yourself of the need to go nuclear right away and then turn around and distribute tactical nuclear weapons in a way that may leave the President with relatively little control over the use of these weapons anyway.